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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE¹

A LOVE MASQUE

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The Characters

The Spirit of Music

The Spirit of Sleep

Orpheus

Pluto

Eurydice

The Inhabitants of the Underworld

SCENE: *The gardens of an estate, on one side of which is a woody thicket. The Spirit of Music stands at the edge of the wood, blowing a silver flute.*

Sleep: Ho, sprites! Leave your haunts and dreams;
Forsake the shady nooks in yonder wood
Where you are wont to live content and well,
As guardians of the weak, and lovers of all youth.
Let shepherds pipe their lays and stars sing on,
As we together make our welcome song
To Orpheus, the greatest bard upon the earth
(Though some do say his lineage be divine),
Who with the Grecian heroes went from here
Over the many waters, seeking the Golden Fleece.
But yester noon he did return, and now
With that fair maid Eurydice by his side
He comes to wander in this wonder spot,
And talk of love. Sprites, I call you. Ho!
(Fairies enter, dancing and singing.)
From our homes in dale and dell,
From the fields we love so well,
We have come at thy command,
Gracious guardian of our band.

¹ A specimen of student work in the Montclair (N.J.) High School. The class had been studying *Comus* and the masque under the direction of Mary W. Carter.

Ours the hidden charm to stay
Grief and sorrow while we play;
Make the wearied eye grow bright,
Sound the echoes with delight.
Children of the great god Pan,
We will frolic while we can;
Yet when Orpheus comes this way,
Longer, then, we cannot stay.
King of Music, he!

(The fairies form a circle around the spirit and all flit back into the wood as Orpheus and Eurydice are seen coming down the terrace.)

- Orpheus:* You see, dear love, in this enchanted spot
Where quiet reigns and beauty charms the eye
We can together sit, and I will tell
A little of the days that now are past.
But yet, how can I speak of days and deeds
That were, when once again I am with you?
Each hour as we sailed our per'lous way
And oft were wearied and sick in mind,
I thought of this fair land and you, so that
My songs were filled with sweetest melodies.
And if such music brought us fortune's smile,
Why then it was because of your dear love
That Heaven granted us protection.
I can no longer linger in this doubt.
So then, fair one, give me the happiest hour
When I may know and say that thou art mine.
Together in this verdant spot we'll dwell;
And great love will so surround our home
That trees and even beasts will love our ways;
And blessings of the gods will shelter us.
- Eurydice:* How could it be thus, great Orpheus?
Thy safety has for long been my one thought.
And since I know thy heart, take mine;
Together we will seek the joys of life,

Then, if misfortune come, we'll meet it strong.
 But see, the twilight curtain gently falls.
 Let us from here and seek the cheery hearth.

(Some weeks later. Orpheus seated alone on the terrace.)

Orpheus: How many weary, weary nights have passed?
 And yet it seems a little while since she was here,
 And 'neath these very trees we sat and talked.
 All nature was at peace, and we with her;
 But since she's gone, the sunlight of my heart,
 My eyes are blinded to the beauty of the fields.
 The gifts we have received from gracious gods
 Are merely lent us for a summer's day.
 There is no rest for me, nor can the song
 Of happy birds and the smiles of flowers
 Remove from me the deadly pain.
 Would that in sleep I might forget it all!

(The Spirit of Sleep appears behind Orpheus on the steps, and as she sings he appears to fall asleep.)

Sleep: Softly, lightly, through the trees
 Blow, breath of spring;
 Merrily, surely, go your way,
 Onward advancing at break of day,
 Out from the East to the West.

Gently, tenderly, find thy path,
 Blow, breath of spring;
 Come to a soul that is sad and forlorn,
 Steal into a heart that is tired and worn,
 Lull it to gentle sleep.

Music: Orpheus, attend!
 The gods do send
 A word of wisdom for thine ear;
 Sit not in mournful solitude,
 Continue not to think and brood,
 Arise, and go from here.
 Let music speak
 For her you seek.

Now journey to the regions down below;
Perchance through magic of your lyre
Pluto will grant you your desire.
Make haste to go!

Orpheus: What words were those that then did float
From 'neath the shadow of the wood to me?
Perchance I dreamed, and yet, if such,
It has in me awakened hope and power.
The gracious gods in their own wisdom gave
Me music's power o'er every living thing;
The very waters calmed, and strife was hushed
As if by magic, when a song I played.
I'll wander on through all the land, until
I find the very cave whose passage leads
To the Underworld where Pluto rules
As sovereign o'er the spirits of the dead.
I do not fear the gloom of that waste place,
For the fires of love within my heart
Will make all pathways light as this fair day.

(The scene changes to the gardens of Pluto. The spirits of the Underworld are all at their appointed tasks. Sisyphus, the fraudulent king, is rolling a monstrous boulder uphill; the daughters of Danaus are drawing up water from a pool in a sieve. In the distance flows the river Styx.)

Spirits: Charon, boatman of the river,
Whom are you bringing today?
Which of the mortals from Eden
Comes in our gardens to stay?
Whence comes the wondrous music
That seems to awaken our hearts,
And makes us remember past hours?
The spell of deep Lethe departs.
O Charon, out on the river,
Return to that shore out of sight;
And spare us the pain of remembrance,
That wakens us out of our night.

(As Orpheus appears on the river-bank, playing his lyre, all are spell-bound, because he is a human singer and sings of things that are in every human heart—youth, love and death, the sweetness of the earth, and the bitterness of losing his love, Eurydice. All the old dreams awake in the shades. Among the crowd of ghosts, Orpheus passes and finally comes singing before the king and queen. And the queen, Proserpina, weeps as she listens to the songs, because it makes her homesick to remember the fields of Enna and her own beautiful mother, Demeter. Then Pluto gives way. He summons Eurydice from among the newly arrived ghosts.)

Pluto: I do not often think about desires,
 Or take regard of wishes of the mortals.
 I, monarch of this state, do reign supreme,
 And none dare go against my word.
 Yet this one time I find 'tis I must yield.
 All guests who come into these regions dim
 In answer to my call, at once become
 The menials of my house and my own will.
 But round this one fair flower has been some charm
 That kept her from becoming one of us.
 The sparkling waters of the Lethe pale
 Could not in her induce forgetfulness
 Of things that she had known. She is apart
 From all, like sunbeams stealing into night
 In this dark hall. And ere your music
 Stirs up more memories in these people here,
 'Twere better that I let you two depart
 Lest the mischief breed too swift among us.
 Go back into the outer, sunny world,
 And when your hearts are moved by nature's ways,
 Think then of those who live in darkest night,
 And know not light, nor love, nor happiness.